



**ROLES AND
RESPONSIBILITIES OF
PRE-SCHOOL
MANAGERS IN THE
CONTEXT OF
OUTDOOR EDUCATION
IN PRE-PRIMARY
EDUCATION**

Vladimír FEDORKO

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“The future will belong to the nature-smart—those individuals, families, businesses, and political leaders who develop a deeper understanding of the transformative power of the natural world and who balance the virtual with the real. The more high-tech we become, the more nature we need.”

Richard Louv

INTRODUCTION

Every preschooler should spend plenty of time outdoors in a natural environment. It is an environment full of irresistible stimuli and contexts related to nurturing, learning and especially play. In addition, educational activities carried out outdoors in a natural environment promote social learning, allow for explanatory conversations, encourage the acquisition of practical skills, the building of social relationships, but also deepen the relationship between the child and nature. And it is in the light of this support that the international **TAKE ME OUT** project was born. From September 2016 to August 2018, teachers from the Department of Pre-school and Elementary Education and Psychology of the Faculty of Education in Prešov actively participated in an international project called *Taking learning outdoors - Supporting the skills of pre-school teachers in outdoor education and care - TAKE ME OUT*. The main coordinator was the civil association INAK (SK) represented by Adriana Kováčová, Janka Sýkorová, whose aim is to do things differently, if possible at least a little bit **IN**novatively **AND** Creatively. The other collaborators are the leaders of the organization STROM OF LIFE (SK): Jozef Kahan, Stanislava Blahová, Michaela Valachovičová. Tree of Life is an environmental, non-governmental, voluntary and non-profit organization. It offers environmental education programmes that are based on systemic (holistic) foundations and focus on clean air, water and waste management, biodiversity, global warming and energy consumption, and the protection of cultural and natural heritage, including the preservation of technical monuments. Among the international partners we should mention: the LEARNING THROUGH LANDSCAPES TRUST (UK, SCOTLAND) represented by Ruth Staples-Rolfe, Mary Jackson and Matthew Robinson, the STOCKHOLMSGAVE CENTRE (DK) with experts such as Søren Emil Markeprand and Trine Andreasen, and not to forget the teachers from the kindergarten RUKKILILLE LASTEAED (EE), namely Margery Lilienthal, Triin Tiits and Maret Jürgenson. From September 2019 to June 2022, teachers from the Department of Pre-school and Elementary Education and Psychology and the Department of Science and Technology Disciplines of the Faculty of Science and Technology of the University of Applied Sciences in Prešov are actively involved in the successful continuation of the international project *entitled Taking learning outdoors - supporting the skills of pre-school managers in outdoor education and care - TAKE ME OUT II. - Happy childhood happens outside - STEP HIGHER*. The main coordinator is again the civil association INAK (SK) represented by Adriana Kováčová, Janka Sýkorová, whose aim is to do things differently, possibly at least a little **IN**novative **And**

Creative. Another partner is STROM OF LIFE (SK) led by Jozef Kahan, Stanislava Blahová, Richard Weber and Martin Zemko. Tree of Life is an environmental, non-governmental, voluntary and non-profit organization, independent from political entities, registered as a civil association. It has a 40-year history with activities throughout the Slovak Republic. The Tree of Life through its experiential education about nature, the environment and quality of life awakens in children the desire to learn, change and act in favour of the protection and enhancement of life on Earth. At the same time, it seeks to develop children's emotional intelligence, influence their value system and strengthen their personal responsibility towards themselves, others and the world. Foreign partners are: UNIVERSITY OF JAN EVANGELISTA PURKYNĚ (CZ) with the Department of Pre-primary and Primary Education, STOCKHOLMSGÄVE CENTRE (DK) with experts such as Søren Emil Markebrand and Trine Andreasen, teachers from the kindergarten RUKKILILLE LASTEAEDE (EE) represented by Margery Lilienthal, Triin Tiits, Maret Jürgenson, but not forgetting the associate partner LEARNING THROUGH LANDSCAPES TRUST (UK, SCOTLAND) with experts Ruth Staples-Rolfe, Mary Jackson and Matthew Robinson. Based on the opinion of the Slovak OMEP Committee, which is reviewing the new State Education Programme for pre-school in Slovakia, there is a difference in the number of performance standards in different learning areas, with more emphasis on mathematics and information work than on children's health and physical movement. A more balanced approach is therefore recommended. However, there is currently a lack of specific curricula or relevant materials for teachers to support the elimination of this discrepancy in practice. The need for relevant educational programmes focusing on outdoor education was clearly defined and confirmed by Slovak kindergarten teachers, participants in an online survey conducted by INAK in February 2016. Through this survey with 326 respondents, up to 88% of that number expressed their interest in new training materials and resources for outdoor activities. In addition, this interest was confirmed by the approximately 200 participants of the ERASMUS+ **TAKE ME OUT** workshops held in eight regions of SK in February 2018. The situation with the integration of outdoor education in kindergartens in European countries varies. The idea, which originated in Scandinavia in the 1950s, is now implemented in many European countries (e.g. SE, DK, UK, DE, CZ, etc.). Based on the proven benefits as well as the very strong interest and need of teachers and kindergarten directors not only in Slovakia, expressed before but also during the implementation of **TAKE ME OUT**, this project aims: to further increase the support and implementation of outdoor education in ECEC and to professionalize the use of this teaching approach at institutional level in public kindergartens in all project countries. Also to improve

the quality of ECEC services in the public sector by using the project outputs and developing new training programmes supporting the skills of teachers and kindergarten directors in implementing outdoor education in everyday practice in all partner countries - SK, EE, DK, CZ, (UK) - with the possibility of future use also in countries outside the current project partnership and at the European level. The aim is to support and strengthen the further development of the new European network, made up of the institutions created through this project. Subsequently, to use new teaching approaches related to the outdoor environment and to make best practices in this sector available and, last but not least, to bring as many children as possible in kindergartens back into the natural environment - i.e. outdoors. We are therefore striving, together with many international experts, to find the best educational programmes for pre-school children, to create outdoor education materials and games that will help meet the needs of our children, but also to help educational leaders to establish and profile kindergartens in outdoor education.



1 PRE-SCHOOL MANAGERS IN THE CONTEXT OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

In recent years, too many school districts have turned inward, building windowless schools, banishing live animals from classrooms, and even dropping recess and field trips, notes Richard Louv, author of the influential book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* (2010). To manage schools more effectively and efficiently, principals need to be relieved of the burden of dealing with the day-to-day running of schools, while at the same time having access to learning opportunities that flexibly reflect their current needs. Only by doing so will it be possible to have a network of schools managed by qualified people with the necessary expertise, leadership skills and sufficient capacity to enable them to create conditions conducive to the work of teachers and the holistic development of all learners (Hall et al. 2019). **Good management and leadership** is key to promoting and sustaining quality in early childhood education settings and to creating a stimulating environment for both teaching staff and the children themselves. Effective management and leadership creates a set of organisational conditions that positively influence the quality of processes, working conditions, and staff engagement in continuous professional learning and growth (Melhuish et al. 2006, Muijs et al. 2004). In this way, effective leadership promotes children's learning, development and well-being (Douglass 2019). Support from educational leaders can alleviate the stress that can arise from different areas of staff work, such as working with large groups of children, documenting children's development, administrative work, and more. **Management, leadership** encompasses two dominant but very broad functions: 1. administrative and 2. pedagogical. While *administrative leadership* refers to tasks related to operations management, strategic planning and management of teaching staff, among others, *pedagogical leadership* is needed to support pedagogical processes through tasks such as supporting curriculum implementation and assessment, creating trusting relationships and supporting the professional growth of teaching staff (Douglass 2019). Longitudinal research has highlighted the importance of the pedagogical function in particular (OECD 2019). However, leadership always depends on context-specific settings (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris 2012), and roles focused on administration and management, rather than building organisational routines, which are sometimes just as important (Liebowitz & Porter 2019, Grissom & Loeb 2011). A study in the United States found that both pedagogical and administrative leadership are significantly correlated with the level of quality achieved in ECEC centres (Dennis & O'Connor 2013). Two

other functions are also very essential according to the TALIS Starting Strong conceptual framework: 1. **parent engagement**, 2. **community engagement and partnerships with other partners**, institutions (Sim & et al. 2019). Both aspects, and in particular the coordination between their different actors, are particularly important to lead and manage in order to maximize opportunities for all children in kindergarten (Muijs et al. 2004). In general, two types of leadership and management structures can be distinguished, although there is also continuity between them. Functions may be carried out by a formal leader - the head of the kindergarten - either independently, or functions may be distributed among individual teaching staff. For example, teaching staff may lead activities focused on the development of teaching staff, on efforts to engage families in the outdoor education process of the kindergarten, or to support the development of an outdoor program (Douglass 2019). Leadership, therefore, does not necessarily rest on the formal function or authority of a single person. Rather, leadership can be practiced by different actors and can also be understood as an organisational quality (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris 2012, Spillane, Halverson & Diamond 2004). This is often referred to as distributed, collaborative, collective or relational leadership as opposed to a hierarchical structure (Douglass, 2019). Few studies have rigorously evaluated the impact of leadership and management on the quality and outcomes of early childhood care, education and care for children (see Douglass 2019). These studies suggest that leadership and management influence a set of practices that can have a positive impact on children's nurturing, learning, development and well-being. Management and leadership can directly influence the quality of interactions between teaching staff, children and parents. Leadership and management can also indirectly influence the quality of these interactions by supporting the professional development of teaching staff, creating a positive working climate and establishing structures that enable teaching staff to collaborate and plan for improvement (OECD 2018, Dennis & O'Connor 2013, Lower & Cassidy 2007). In addition, leaders¹ - principals - can influence the quality of the process through their own actions, but also by providing a variety of supports to the leadership of teaching staff (Sebastian, Allensworth & Huang 2016, Whalen et al. 2016). **The main goal of the kindergarten principal in outdoor education** is to properly lead and manage the kindergarten teaching staff in outdoor education. To know the principles of forming and effectively leading a work team and to implement the knowledge of personnel management into the leadership practice that leads to the development of outdoor education in kindergarten.

¹ (MANAGER = HEAD TEACHER = PRINCIPAL = DIRECTOR = EDUCATIONAL LEADER = SUPERVISOR = LEAD TEACHER = LEADER - it's one person).

Other sub-tasks of the principal are:

- to be able to design a staffing strategy for a kindergarten in the context of outdoor education,
- be able to develop a competence profile of a pedagogical staff member focused on outdoor education,
- know the procedure for selecting and recruiting staff, their adaptation, professional development and termination of employment,
- implement personnel management in accordance with the legislation,
- to know the prerequisites and requirements for the performance of work activity within outdoor education, pedagogical staff,
- to be able to use outdoor motivational strategies and theories in improving the work performance of pedagogical employees of the kindergarten,
- to know the laws of communication and errors in communication of a senior member of staff in a kindergarten,
- know the principles of effective management of work meetings,
- know how to effectively address the issue of covert leadership for the benefit of a managed outdoor education organization,
- know the principles of appropriate conflict resolution procedures,
- know the types of mediation, its principles, process and alternative conflict resolution options in a given setting,
- know the characteristics of an effective working outdoor team and how to form and shape it,
- be able to apply appropriate procedures for identifying and eliminating socially pathological behaviour in the workplace,
- be able to design an outdoor adaptive training programme for beginning teaching staff,
- be able to develop, modify and assess a system of evaluation of teaching staff in outdoor education,
- to be able to design criteria and methods of evaluation of work performance

- outdoor education of children, pedagogical employee and to define competences of outdoor pedagogical employee,
- to be able to design and assess the remuneration system for pedagogical staff of the kindergarten.

The head teacher is given day-to-day responsibility for pedagogical practices, staff and administration. The head teacher shall ensure that pedagogical practices comply with the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan and that staff have a common understanding of their duties as described in these documents. The head teacher shall enable staff to put their expertise into practice. Good pedagogical and administrative management requires good co-operation with the kindergarten owner, the pedagogical leaders and other kindergarten staff. The head teacher shall lead and follow up on the planning, documentation, evaluation and development of kindergarten content and working methods and ensure that the entire staff are involved. The head teacher shall ensure that the kindergarten adopts procedures for co-operating with relevant institutions such as schools, health centres, the educational psychology service and the child protection service (Ministry of Education and Research, The Directorate for Education and Training 2017. **Primary responsibilities pre-school director in outdoor education: Planning and Directing:** Develop & implement the pilot preschool program and oversee all day-to-day activities, including: Designing developmentally appropriate nature-based pre-school curriculum guided by the mission, principles, and practices for early childhood learning and supported by standards for early childhood education

- Forming and leading a parent advisory committee.
- Designing policies, forms, and procedures.
- Designing and setting up the classroom space.
- Obtaining licensing.
- Managing early budgets from the pre-school.
- Assisting development staff with fundraising.
- Working with marketing & development staff to promote the pre-school and other early childhood programs.
- Obtaining accreditation in outdoor education.

Teaching and Evaluating

- Serve as group supervisor/lead teacher for all children enrolled in nature pre-school.

- Teach toddlers, parents, and pre-schoolers in other early childhood programs, including summer camp.
- Assess programs based on current research and developmentally appropriate practices.
- Improve and expand the selection of programs and experiences for young children and their families (i.e., self-led opportunities, exhibits, site features and playscapes, programs, and special-event activities).
- Assure compliance with all relevant governmental regulations. Be aware of, and responsive to, non-regulated best practices within the early childhood profession.
- Lead professional development workshops for early childhood educators.

Supervising

- Hire, train, direct, schedule, supervise, and evaluate an assistant group supervisor/pre-school educator.
- Hire, train, direct, schedule, supervise, and evaluate volunteers with assistance from the pre-school educator.
- Develop student teaching opportunities and internships for early childhood nature education.

Creating Community

- Ensure that parents are informed and involved with their children's experiences and progress. Plan and facilitate parent and volunteer involvement in programs.
- Develop relationships with other preschools, Head Start, community and professional organizations, colleges, and funders to increase opportunities for young children and families to connect to nature.
- Promote the importance of early childhood nature education to parents, caregivers, teachers, funders, elected officials, etc. through workshops, seminars, magazine articles, and interviews
- Participate staff meetings and special events as appropriate to ensure connection with the rest of the staff and members (The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education 2013).



2 OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact that being **active outdoors** can have on the development of a child's motor skills, health and concentration (Hayward, Rothenberg & Beasley 1974, Barbour 1990, Serap, Sadettin & Mustafa 2011). According to Canning (2010), successful **outdoor activities** offer flexible opportunities where children engage in imaginative, creative play, develop their communication skills and build relationships with other children and adults. Several studies indicate that there is a need to increase public awareness regarding the importance of outdoor gaming in supporting a child's well-being, learning and development. (Mackett & Paskins 2008, Powell 2009, Kernan & Devine 2010). Bilton (2010) stresses that **indoor** and **outdoor spaces**, combined together, create the best developmental environment for children of the preschool age, when **outdoor activities** are planned as part of daily educational activities. The **outdoor environment** offers children opportunities to see the world in a new way, to experiment and develop various skills (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 2007). **Outdoor education** has far reaching benefits for children, teachers, communities and society. Research (Oberle, Zeni, Munday & Brussoni 2021) shows that outdoor education can improve children's social-emotional functioning and behavioral health (Gustafsson, Szczepanski, Nelson & Gustafsson 2012, Hartmeyer & Mygind 2016) increase physical activity (Mygind 2007) enhance academic learning and cognitive functioning (Fiennes, Oliver, Dickson, Escobar, Romans & Oliver 2015, Fägerstam & Blom 2013, Fägerstam & Samuelsson 2014) and increase motivation for learning (Fägerstam & Grothéus 2018). Teachers can benefit from improved children-teacher relationships and classroom management (Fägerstam 2014) during outdoor learning (Silverman & Corneau 2018). The community can benefit because outdoor learning facilitates children's lifelong environmental stewardship. **Outdoor education** in outdoor activities can be understood as education and training in outdoor games and activities, comprehensively and effectively intervening and shaping the personal, social and moral side of the child's personality. We are talking about environmental education in the sense of the sustainability of our common natural environment. **Outdoor education** should therefore be a natural part of the educational process, as both indoors and outdoors offer different but complementary environments for learning and education. However, the quality of the outdoor experience is the best it can be - it is authentic, meaningful and essential for the real-life future of those we care about most - our little ones. Positive results from the impact of **outdoor education** on children are evidenced by research

in Scandinavia or the UK (Parsons 2007), where **outdoor education** with an emphasis on environmental education is now routinely and fully implemented (Sabol et al. 2019, Andreassen et al. 2018, Piskura 2018). Outdoor games and activities have an important role in a child's education - they help them to understand the world around them, to understand complex systems in nature, and this is achieved through observation, interaction with the world around them, and interpretation of natural phenomena and changes throughout the year. It also means helping children to live in harmony with their immediate surroundings and to integrate into the world in which we live (EducationScotland 2020). Through **outdoor education**, children can engage their physical, mental and emotional aspects, their bodies to be healthy, their minds to be fresh, and their limbs to be agile" (Komenský 1991, p. 85). It warns, however, against such toys (objects) with which children might hurt themselves or damage other things. "Thus, whatever children want to play with, if it is not harmful, they should be encouraged rather than prevented from doing so. For they have nothing else to occupy themselves with seriously, and play is harmful to both spirit and body" (Komenský 1991, p. 86). Indeed, outdoor education can create opportunities for the emergence of integrated learning experiences combining aspects of intellectual, physical, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual development. Our lifestyles are becoming increasingly sedentary, but the implementation of outdoor play can change this in early childhood. **Our outdoor natural environment**, which has an unstructured and ever-changing natural context, provides an ideal setting for improving a child's physical as well as psychological health and development. Research reports that active play outdoors can have a significant impact on children's physical activity (Harrington & Brussoni 2015), which in turn improves blood pressure, cholesterol and bone density (Lewicka & Farrell 2007, Copeland et al. 2012), contributing to the reduction and prevention of childhood obesity (Raustorp et al. 2012). Children are more physically active when playing outdoors. In fact, Kneeshaw-Price et al. (2013) reported that 6- to 11-year-old children were active 41% of the time outdoors compared to 18% indoors. Physical activity outdoors can also lead to other positive effects compared to physical activity indoors (Thompson Coon et al. 2011, Pesce et al. 2016), i.e., it reduces, for example, the risk of chronic disease (Strong et al. 2005) and mental health risks (Mitchell 2013). In addition, it has been suggested that children's movement and physical activity in the outdoors can promote favourable health behaviours and attitudes towards physical fitness (Bandura 2004, Barnett et al. 2006), as these individuals continue to exhibit higher levels of physical activity in adulthood (Calogiuri 2016). Outdoor **games and activities** also provide opportunities for experimentation and exploration (Weber 2010, Mahdjoubi & Akplotsyi 2012). Being outdoors strengthens the musculoskeletal and immune systems, so

children are less prone to illness and are clearly more balanced (Agostini, Minelli & Mandolesi 2018). Exploratory games and activities² can also contribute to the development of self-esteem and resilience (Ceciliani & Borsari 2009), can support the development of imagination and mind for miracle, the development of imagination, supporting creative knowledge (Cobb 1977, Dahlgren & Szczepanski 1998, Ewert et al. 2014). Consistent with these findings, McAnally et al. (2018) evaluated the effects of a 15-week outdoor education program without access to electronic media among 14-year-old boys, noting improvements in creative thinking and in their level of satisfaction (impact on positive environmental climate). In a social-relational sense, **outdoor games and activities** promote social cohesion, reduce the propensity for conflict, and stimulate the development of a sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency (Kaplan & Kaplan 1994, Moore 1996). In terms of cognitive development, **outdoor education** stimulates intelligence and improves mental focus, attention, reflection and memory (Basile 2000, Miklitz 2001, Hartig et al. 2003, Szczepanski 2007). In the primary school context, outdoor education has been shown to be extremely important and useful in improving peer work, enhancing leadership development, improving problem-solving skills, and reducing antisocial and deviant behaviour (Fjørtoft 2001, Pyle 2002, Malone & Tranter 2003). Gustaffson et al. (2011) investigated different areas of children's mental health and showed how beneficial the intervention and **impact of outdoor education**, which lasted for 1 year, was for children aged 6 to 12 years. The boys' results confirmed that this type of education led to a reduction in various mental health difficulties. The study by Monti et al. (2017), in turn, demonstrated positive effects of a 1-year outdoor education intervention in kindergartens on children aged 1-3 years (compared to children in traditional kindergartens). Children in kindergartens where **outdoor education** was implemented showed greater improvements in cognitive, social, and emotional development, motor skills, and physical functions (e.g., breathing, digestion, sleep) after daily outdoor activities, play. In a study by Ulseta et al. (2017), they followed 562 Norwegian children aged 3 to 7 years and measured various dimensions of mental health under the influence of outdoor education. They subsequently found that children's symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity tended to decrease, and short-term memory (as measured by a digit span task) tended to improve over time. Given the beneficial impact of an outdoor education approach on preschool child

² **Exploratory activities, games** are, in the early years, forms of heuristic play that involve giving infants and toddlers a range of everyday objects rather than proper toys. This encourages children to explore what interests them most. In such games, there should always be adult supervision, but with minimal adult involvement or intervention, so that children can explore objects freely, without rules or restrictions. Exploration and experimentation are essential in these forms of play, so children should always have something to choose from. The materials should also appeal to different interests so that children can find something that catches their attention..

development and achievement, it is important to consider how outdoor education while being outdoors is implemented in daily educational activities in the context of preschool education. Many European and non-European countries have included **outdoor education in the daily activities** of children in nurseries, kindergartens and primary schools. In Scandinavian countries, for example, children's outdoor play and activities are very positively perceived and valued as a relevant part of everyday life (Norðdahl & Einarsdóttir 2015), which is why many kindergartens offer a large number of activities, activities and games designed for children outdoors (Borge et al. 2003, Nilsen 2008). In Scandinavia, there is a strong belief that *children and nature belong inseparably together* (Gullestad 1997). Gullestad (1992) points out that nature is part of two extremely important perspectives. *First*, there is an opposition between home and nature. Home is associated with order and security, while nature is associated with wilderness and danger. In nature, man is trained to cope with obstacles and survive. *Secondly*, nature is the antithesis of the city. Nature thus represents cosmos, order and wholeness, while the city represents chaos and fragmentation. Nature helps to create a sense of wholeness in people, and many people have powerful emotional and spiritual experiences in the outdoor natural environment. Like home, nature is also characterized by harmony. Änggård (2010) found in her observations that the natural environment greatly supports preschool education, and nature is used in three main ways in preschool education:

- *as a class* where children are brought up and learn about nature in different ways,
- *as a home* - a quiet place where you can eat, sleep, meet and play,
- *like an enchanted world* - a fairytale landscape inhabited by fairytale characters and animals with human characteristics.

Grahn (1992) states that being in an outdoor natural environment counteracts stress and provides opportunities for recreation and relaxation in our daily lives. He sees nature as a source of human renewal. Nature provides opportunities for people to develop spontaneous attention while allowing their thoughts to roam freely. Frustration is less common in natural settings than elsewhere (Kaplan 1990). However, it is not easy for a kindergarten principal or a kindergarten teacher alone to effectively and comprehensively implement outdoor education in the educational process of a kindergarten. In fact, various factors such as the child's gender, the child's temperament, the socioeconomic status of the family, and the mental health of the parents can influence this relationship (Ulset et al. 2017). Also, kindergarten-related variables can play a significant role, namely group size, the relationship between teachers and children,

barriers related to the natural context and/or architectural structures (Ulset et al. 2017), and the availability of specific play items and materials in outdoor locations (Brown et al. 2009). However, it is important to note that sometimes the most powerful positive or negative influencers on a child are the adults - the principal, teacher or parents. The child is merely following that real role model. Other important variables include the quality of the child-teacher relationship (Tonge et al. 2017), as well as parents' and teachers' beliefs about the importance of the outdoor environment and outdoor education (Insenberg 1990, Kagan 1992, Pjares 1992, Fang 1996). In terms of parents, it has been shown that they typically understand the benefits of natural, outdoor natural spaces for their children to play, engage in activities, and learn. They value natural environments much more than urban ones (Wang et al. 2018). In terms of teachers' perspectives, McClintic & Petty (2015) explored beliefs about outdoor play in preschool and reported that the teachers interviewed in their study considered outdoor play to be both necessary and along with the opportunity for children to experience free play. However, they perceived their role as limited to supervising children's activities and did not fully understand the potential of the outdoor environment for child development. Teachers are tasked with planning activities, providing a challenging and creative environment, and supporting children's strengths, all while maintaining children's needs and avoiding disrupting or interrupting their activities (Wilford 1996, Frost et al. 2011). Therefore, the ways in which teachers explain and design outdoor activities and games for children acknowledge children's natural need to move and experiment a lot. At the same time, they encourage their experimentation, sensory experiences and actions in outdoor contexts, which are crucial in achieving success (Nelson 2006, Gehris et al. 2014). However, many teachers rarely prioritize outdoor education (McClintic & Petty 2015) and tend to devote less time and attention to **outdoor activities** and games compared to indoor activities and games (Wellhousen 2002). Based on these findings, research that examines teachers' perceptions following the implementation of outdoor education is imperative. There is a need for more precise and specific research on the extent and manner in which teachers currently perceive the usefulness and validity of outdoor education that supports holistic child development in a kindergarten setting. It is also important to explore how teachers promote outdoor activities, the structure of outdoor play within different age ranges of children and within different environmental locations (Hu et al. 2015). Wardle (1997) has demonstrated in his research that outdoor physical activities help to develop not only children's motor skills, but also their communication, emotional, social and cognitive skills. Gill (2014) highlighted that the outdoor environment facilitates children to make connections between their individual sensory experiences, motor activities and learning. These results suggest that

continuous **outdoor activities and games** in the outdoor natural environment provide greater opportunities for teachers to be positive in supporting children's development. This may occur when teachers perceive the natural environment as a learning and developmental environment rather than just a recreational environment. Children in kindergartens show a spontaneous preference for being outdoors rather than indoors and a desire to use the outdoor environment to explore the different things they can find outdoors that bring them joy (Norðdahl & Einarsdóttir, 2015). Thus, the activities suggested by teachers in outdoor education seem to be more in line with children's preferences. However, it must be noted that teachers play a key role in encouraging children to play (Podhájecká 2006). **Play** is an essential activity and method of self-expression for children aged 3-5 years as they gain new experiences in learning about the world (Soini et al. 2014, Podhájecká 2006). More playful activities (e.g. exploration) are associated with benefits related to physical activity and mental and emotional health (Gill 2014). Free play also often shows significant positive effects on children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, independence and creativity (Frost et al. 2011). The high frequency of outdoor activities and play in preschools represents a practical, simple, effective, and inexpensive way to promote comprehensive development in all domains of the preschool child (Ulset et al. 2017). *Principles of outdoor play* in the early years (Bilton 2010):

- Indoors and outdoors need to be viewed as one combined and integrated environment.
- Indoors and outdoors need to be available to the children simultaneously.
- Outdoors is an equal player to indoors and should receive planning, management, evaluation, resourcing, staffing and adult interaction on a par with indoors.
- Outdoors is both a teaching and learning environment.
- Outdoor design and layout needs careful consideration.
- Outdoor play is central to young children's learning, possibly more to some children than others.
- The outdoor classroom offers children the opportunity to utilise effective modes of learning – play, movement and sensory experience.
- Children need versatile equipment and environments.
- Children need to be able to control, change and modify their environment.
- Staff have to be supportive toward outdoor play.

Outdoor education - being outdoors - offers "a comprehensive learning environment in which educators embrace nature-based learning and can be seen in the experiences offered to children" (Macquairre et al. 2015, p. 11). Louv (2010) argues that educators can draw inspiration from

Europe's forest kindergartens. "Not everyone has a forest out the back door, but there are often nearby opportunities just as rich in their own way," he says. Louv (2010) details the benefits of spending time in nature: He says kids learn self-confidence. Likewise, hyperactive children improve their focus. Kids playing in nature more often invent their own games and play cooperatively, and they tend to test higher in science. We need new ways of thinking and new educational responses to what Levin, Cashore, Bernstein & Auld (2012) have termed "super-wicked" problems (in order to define a new class of global social and environmental problems). Kansanen (2003) has pointed out that learning is based on particular relationships between the teacher, the child and the content that is educated in the instructional process. Place needs to be considered as a central component of this relationship. This is because one place is different from another and so teaching and outdoor education opportunities vary from one place to another. Thus, paying attention to place gives voice to nature as teacher and adds a further dimension to the relationship between teacher, child and content. Adventure and outdoor therapies are also very important. Adventure and outdoor therapies aim to create possibilities for meta-level change in participants' behaviour and emotions. These changes can be achieved through purposeful action-based tasks, which are usually carried out in natural outdoor environments. (Gass 1993) A therapist - teacher, aims to bring up the participant's - child capacity to develop one's spiritual aspects, such as enhancing self-esteem, widening self-perception and growing self-reliance, and facilitate a change to transfer gained competence to other areas in life (Levack 2003). Education for sustainable development means integrating the idea of sustainability and the goals of sustainable development within the education system (Härkönen 2013). Preschool education has an important role in the educational and personal development process of an individual. According to the holistic approach, educators should gauge the physical, social, emotional, and cultural distance of planned learning contents and experiences from the individual child's immediate daily reality. The changes in the educational paradigm as well as the environmental issues that have emerged worldwide in recent decades provide a reason for the wider use of outdoor learning in education. Numerous researchers believe that natural outdoor settings hold endless possibilities for learning in all curricular domains (Crim et al. 2008, Niklasson & Sandberg 2010, Melhuus 2012, Louv 2010, Tucker et al. 2011). However, preschool teachers and principals may not recognize the potential opportunities for learning in natural outdoor settings, or the alignment between early childhood pedagogy and the opportunities offered by experiences in nature (Tuuling, Ugaste & Õun 2015). How teachers perceive the natural environment and the benefits of outdoor education are key factors in the implementation of daily outdoor activities with a positive impact on child

development. There are many benefits to children and youth playing outside. **Outside**, children and youth can release energy, use loud voices, play vigorously, and engage in messy projects. In addition, children can experience the plants and animals in their local ecosystem (Greenman 2007). Research has helped us identify many other benefits to playing outdoors (Children and Nature Network 2012), such as:

- better physical health,
- numerous opportunities to strengthen motor skills,
- stress relief,
- greater visual-motor integration (or the ability to control hand or body movement guided by vision),
- greater creativity,
- stronger verbal and social skills,
- production of Vitamin D (an essential vitamin for bone health) through exposure to sunlight increased attention and cognitive abilities (Wells 2000)

Children who had grown up around the lowest levels of vegetation had a 30% higher risk of neurotic, stress-related, or psychosomatic disorders — even after researchers adjusted for the effects of socioeconomic status. The children were also at higher risk for mood disorders and substance abuse (Engemann et al. 2019). Among kids experiencing life stressors (like bullying), the children who reported the fewest psychological problems were those who had greater access to nature. And once again, the link held even after accounting for socioeconomic factors (Wells & Evans 2003). Teachers who plan for appropriate and creative use of **outdoor education**, that is, while being outdoors, actually support the promotion of preschoolers' well-being and mental health in kindergarten. Children practicing **outdoor education** in kindergarten appear to benefit significantly from this educational approach because, compared to children attending more traditional kindergartens, they are more likely to experience continuous and multiple outdoor activities during the school years with greater benefits, at least in the short term. For these reasons, our social policy should involve more resources, not only within education, to spread the practices of outdoor education from an early age. At the same time, further research should be carried out to examine, for example, the benefits of **outdoor education - living outside** - within different age groups of children, including the role of mitigating variables as well as the sustainability of impact over time (see *It's good for them, it's good for you – Social & Emotional Learning through bringing nature back to schools – SEL FOR SCHOOLS*

(Erasmus+) – KA2 – Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices Strategic Partnerships for school education, project number: 2020-1-SK01-KA201-078325).



3 SUPPORTING THE SKILLS OF PRE-SCHOOL MANAGERS IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION

We will try to show how to expand your knowledge and especially your practical skills in outdoor education in the following chapter, which has a strong application character. We will help you to take advantage of opportunities to support teaching staff who incorporate outdoor natural environments as an extension of the educational and learning environment. We will seek to ensure that your teaching staff have sufficient knowledge and other resources to use the outdoor natural environment effectively as an integral and rich educational and learning environment within the curriculum documents. The **aim of every educational leader** should be to:

- actively work with trainers, coaches, teach and see their teaching staff, the importance of looking at the natural external environment as a quality and effective extended educational environment,
- provide pedagogical staff with resources for their effective use of the natural external environment as an integral and rich educational environment within the fulfillment of curricular goals,
- provide pedagogical staff with feedback on their and other natural outdoor educational environments.

The experience of children in **outdoor education** supports many aspects of their personal development. In many outdoor programs, children spend several hours a day outdoors. It is an extremely valuable time for children to develop their physical skills and sophisticated play skills. Much of what is done indoors can be easily adapted to the natural outdoor environment. Four aspects are key in the work of the head pedagogical staff with others, as they make the natural external environment integral and rich in educational activities for children aged 0 to 12. The four key aspects are: **security, appearance, space and accessibility.**

Safety

Try to evaluate your natural outdoor environment regularly. Work with your teaching staff to make sure they carry out their own daily safety checks before children use the natural outdoor area. Have a system in place so that your teaching staff knows:

- who is responsible for outdoor safety checklists, but especially for programs where your natural outdoor spaces are shared by children from different classes,
- how safety checklists or checks are documented (ie what forms to use and where to store, archive),
- what they should do if a problem is found.

Also, make sure that your equipment is safe and that the natural environment is free of preventable risks. You need to consider the fall zones, the surface, the access to the shadow and the condition of the materials and equipment. If you are concerned about the safety of children or that your natural environment is not completely safe, address it immediately.

Exterior appearance - design

Your natural outdoor spaces can offer many of the same interest areas and activities that make up a preschool child development program. For preschool child development programs, you can encourage your teaching staff to provide sand, water, wheeled toys for simple nature play, items for woodworking, quiet activities, science play materials, and exploratory activities, i.e., nature-related play, in your natural outdoor spaces (Colker, Dodge & Heroman 2004). Add gardening and sports equipment, fitness equipment, musical aids, instruments, and natural habitats to your natural outdoor environment. For exploration and discovery, these elements can not only help children, but also support them in their learning outside of the school day. As well as in the classroom or during learning activities, teaching staff need to make sure that natural outdoor spaces are organised so that they are independent of each other, easy to use and can be used seamlessly to educate children. With the help of other teaching staff, it is important to ensure that outdoor activities and games can take place safely in one space without disrupting activities in another space. Also make sure that 'quiet' activities (art, drawing with chalk, playing with blocks, sand, reading under a tree, etc.) are separated from 'loud and active' games (playing with a ball, cycling, running, etc.).

Outdoor natural space

All teaching staff should be prepared to make the best use of the outdoor natural space available to the kindergarten. Not all outdoor natural spaces are ideal, but that doesn't mean you have to settle for a simple playground, with metal play structures and tarmac. You can help each other to brainstorm and be creative, i.e. make appropriate and effective use of the natural outdoor space available to the kindergarten. Your local DIY store can be a great resource. Fill plastic rain gutters with clay and let the children use them as planters. Old swimming pools can become

sandboxes or large planters. Recycled cardboard boxes, crates, PVC pipes, and milk cartons can become wonderful building blocks in a sand playground (see U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, <https://fws.gov/>). If you are a program manager in an outdoor education program, you are the leader who should be coordinating the maximum use of the outdoor natural spaces available at your preschool. You can help organize a group of volunteers, perhaps enlisting parents to help set up bird feeders, raised garden beds, or other features to increase children's engagement outdoors. Don't be afraid to ask for donations from local businesses, parents, or various non-profit programs that are dedicated to the development and sustainability of outdoor education.

Availability

Accessibility of the natural external environment has the following aspects:

- ensure that children have access to the resources they need outside,
- ensure that the environment is accessible to all children. First and foremost, make sure that all the basic necessities are available to children outside, in a natural environment, full of children. Make sure you have easy access to toilets, drinking water and shade.

To create a **suitable outdoor natural environment**, you will need to meet the following conditions:

- organize a campaign with donations for materials for the garden, drama field, stage or natural environment (sand, water, wood, stone, etc.),
- if the climate allows, consider setting up an outdoor classroom that is active during some or all seasons.
- try to change your approach to the weather. Only go indoors during very bad weather,
- make sure you have enough outdoor storage space for supplies and equipment. Model and train cleanliness habits with children by keeping order in storage and play areas,
- ask children to play outside,
- involve older children or families in identifying problems and finding solutions,
- promote outdoor play areas and time spent outdoors for all children and the whole kindergarten in the kindergarten,
- talk informally with all kindergarten pedagogical staff and parents, children's families about the importance of outdoor spaces,

- consider arranging several meetings of your teaching staff with professionals who can help transform your outdoor natural environment to be suitable for a full-fledged educational activity.

As the outdoor natural environment is shared by different classes of children, your coordination and management are very important. You need to help everyone find a collective vision for providing appropriate outdoor natural spaces. Model and practice children's curiosity, problem-solving as you work with your teaching staff. When a space needs to be furnished or rearranged, bring everyone together to make a list of all the activities, events and materials that the outdoor space should contain. Use this list to set goals for your outdoor space and clearly define the spaces that serve different functions. Also, keep direct and open communication between everyone working on different changes in the same space. It is important that all of your teaching staff understand the goals of outdoor and environmental design. Remember that you will also need to foster cohesion between all teaching staff working different shifts in the same classroom, and between different groups of children who are in the same space. Sometimes you may need to facilitate collaboration and actively enter into arrangements for the use of shared outdoor natural spaces.

We recommend to the leading pedagogical staff of the kindergarten:

- have an overview of legislative standards, which are very often subject to various additions, changes, updates, as these need to be implemented as soon as possible in the individual documents of the school,
- to support the confidence of pedagogical staff in your ability, even if you will help them, protect them, lead and represent them professionally,
- model, practice management and set expectations to meet school priorities,
- make reasonable decisions to meet school priorities,
- develop an analysis of the risks and benefits of outdoor education and incorporate them into the school documentation,
- to ensure the highest possible safety in terms of legal and moral obligations in the care of children who are entrusted to the care of pedagogical staff (Andreasen et al. 2018).

Plan your lesson flow to maximize children learning and focus Cornell & Louv (2015) in *Sharing Nature with Children* recommends structuring outdoor activities to maximize learning by “awakening enthusiasm and curiosity” and engaging children in direct experiences.

Consider the following in your planning: *Active Activities*. A short active activity can channel excess energy and prepare childrens to focus on a more detailed task. *Observation and Direct Experiences*. Allow children to engage with nature on a meaningful level. Foster a deeper understanding of the natural world by providing childrens with opportunities to use their senses, develop their observational skills, engage in hands-on exploration and experimentation and make personal connections to nature. *Reflection*. Provide an opportunity for children to share their thinking and inspiration, learn from one another and consolidate their own learning.

1. Standard LS	LEGISLATION AND SAFETY
Characteristics	<p>Every kindergarten, whose task is to implement pre-primary education in the school environment, must respect and comply with generally binding legal standards in the implementation of outdoor education. The legislation applies to all kindergarten activities as an educational institution: the content of education (national curriculum, school curriculum), staffing, material-technical, safety, health, hygiene, spatial and financial conditions. It is necessary to have an overview of individual legislative norms, to incorporate them into the internal documents of the kindergarten, to follow them and at the same time to monitor their changes. Closely related to this are the protection and safety regulations or practices that determine and at the same time limit the manner and scope of outdoor education in kindergarten. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the risks and benefits of outdoor education, which is incorporated into the documentation of the kindergarten.</p>
Standard LS1	<p style="text-align: center;">Planning</p> <p><i>Kindergarten in the context of the definition of the main factors of outdoor education (content and conditions, process and organization) is based on the competence potential of the child. In the area of Legislation and safety in the educational process in the Planning phase, it should focus on:</i> generally binding legal regulations concerning the rights and obligations of employees, the rights and obligations of children, the rights and obligations of legal representatives, management processes, decision-making, economics and school operation, safety and hygiene requirements, property management and financial control. Also, elaborating an internal document of the kindergarten focused on a positive perception of appropriate risks and challenges in the context of outdoor education and their justification for the healthy development of the child.</p>
Standard LS2	<p style="text-align: center;">Organizing and delegating</p> <p><i>Kindergarten in the context of the definition of the main factors of outdoor education (content and conditions, process and organization) is based on the competence potential of the child. In the area of Legislation and safety in the educational process in the Organizing and delegating phase, it should focus on:</i></p>

	<p>structure of responsibility for compliance with generally binding legal regulations, rights and obligations, safety criteria relating to outdoor education following the LS1 standard, determination of responsibility of parents for informing about the current state of health and possible changes in the child. In the context of outdoor education, ensuring adequate risk and challenges for the child's healthy development while keeping the basic safety and health protection of children and teaching staff.</p>
<p>Standard LS3</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Implementing and realization</p>
	<p><i>Kindergarten in the context of the definition of the main factors of outdoor education (content and conditions, process and organization) is based on the competence potential of the child. In the area of Legislation and safety in the educational process in the Implementing and realization phase, it should focus on:</i></p> <p>obligations arising for individual pedagogical staff, parents and kindergarten partners from the application of generally binding legal regulations, rights and obligations, safety criteria relating to outdoor education following the LS1 standard.</p>
<p>Standard LS4</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Leading and coordinating</p>
	<p><i>Kindergarten in the context of the definition of the main factors of outdoor education (content and conditions, process and organization) is based on the competence potential of the child. In the area of Legislation and safety in the educational process in the Leading and coordinating phase, it should focus on:</i></p> <p>application of generally binding legal regulations and safety criteria relating to outdoor education in the sense of the LS1 standard based on the personal responsibility of individual pedagogical staff, parents and kindergarten partners.</p>
<p>Standard LS5</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Controlling and reporting</p>
	<p><i>Kindergarten in the context of the definition of the main factors of outdoor education (content and conditions, process and organization) is based on the competence potential of the child. In the area of Legislation and safety in the educational process in the Controlling and reporting phase, it should focus on:</i></p> <p>control of compliance with generally binding legal regulations and safety criteria relating to outdoor education following the LS1 standard at specified intervals for individual pedagogical staff, parents and kindergarten partners.</p>
<p>Standard LS6</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Feedback</p>
	<p><i>Kindergarten in the context of the definition of the main factors of outdoor education (content and conditions, process and organization) is based on the competence potential of the child. In the area of Legislation and safety in the educational process in the Feedback phase, it should focus on:</i></p> <p>assessment of the application of and compliance with generally binding legislation and safety criteria, depending on the local context. Ongoing review and updating of internal documentation regarding the positive perception of risk and challenges in education following the needs of</p>

	healthy development of children and preserving their safety and health protection.
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Fedorko, V. et al. (2022). *Metodika štandardov a štandardy outdoorovej edukácie v materskej škole*. Kremnica: INAK.

Finally, we can also point to one of the primary goals of outdoor education courses in higher education, and that is to create competent outdoor leaders (Martin et al. 2017, Priest & Gass 2018). Indeed, already here in quality university preparation, future teachers, principals receive a lot of stimuli, not only on the theoretical level, but especially on the practical level, and thus they can focus on significantly shifting their competencies within outdoor education leadership. One way to do this is to help others develop self-management and autonomy (Tordsson 2014). Reflection, feedback, autonomy, real-life situations, and self-support are often emphasized in the literature to support various learning processes (Beames & Brown 2016, Vikene et al. 2019) and are central to experiential-experiential learning theory. Experiential learning has been an educational philosophy and pedagogical approach in outdoor education programmes internationally for decades (Martin et al. 2017, Priest & Gass, 2018). **Outdoor leadership** requires a wide range of skills including technical, organizational, self-management, judgment, decision-making, and interpersonal skills. It is common in outdoor **leadership courses** to classify outdoor leadership into *hard* or *soft* skills. Hard skills are technical competencies such as rope handling for rock climbing, ice climbing, whitewater kayaking, kayak rescue, etc. Individuals are regularly assessed for hard skills in outdoor leadership programs. Soft skills such as decision-making, judgment, and group relationships in the field are also commonly assessed (Graham 1997, Martin et al. 2017, Priest & Gass 2018). In terms of hard or soft skills, most leadership theories assume that leadership is a complex relationship between the leader and the context in which the leader engages (Graham 1997, Martin et al. 2017, Priest & Gass 2018). **Leadership** can be understood as a process driven by a person's intention to influence, to help a person or group achieve goals that they could not achieve on their own (Graham 1997, Yukl 2013). Yukl (1989) describes **four categories of outdoor leadership behavior**. These leadership behaviors are important in a pedagogical context to teach all components towards facilitating the education and learning of children outdoors. First, the *informational category of giving-seeking* includes components that directly relate to communication skills (Sibthorp et al. 2007), teaching and facilitation (Martin et al. 2017), instructional, facilitation skills, and effective communication (Priest & Gass 2018). Second, the *category of decision* making is ubiquitous in the management, leadership, and outdoor literature. The primary concern of

outdoor leaders in decision making is judgment, a skill honed by honest reflection on experience. According to several studies (Enoksen & Lynch 2018, Faarlund 2003, Graham, 1997), outdoor leaders need judgment to solve social as well as physical problems and to make decisions. Third, an *educational leader needs the ability to influence people*. Having a flexible leadership style (Priest & Gass 2018) and being aware of personal conduct and professional ethics (Martin et al. 2017, Priest & Gass 2018). These are skills that enable a leader to influence other people. Fourth, *relationship building includes support, networking, conflict management, and team building*, and all the skills needed to work with small group behavior. **Situated learning** (Faarlund 2003, Vikene et al. 2019) highlights the importance of being active, engaged and learning from real situations. Situated practical learning in the community is also supported by Høyem (2010). By giving students the task of creating a snow cave, for example, the teacher makes it easier for students to hone their ability to solve real-world problems in a meaningful situation. For an experience to be educational, Dewey (1938) points out that it must create a thirst for further learning and be meaningfully connected to the "objective conditions of the learner's life." Wenger (2004) interprets objective conditions as the four key components of situationally oriented learning:

- educational activities should be contained in a meaningful context,
- learning takes place in a community where students are accepted and recognized,
- practice-based activities must be as realistic as possible,
- situational learning will ultimately affect the learner's identity.

Similarly, Tordsson (2014) views **friluftsliv**³ as a practice that has natural (situational), enacted (action), and pedagogical (understanding) elements, and these three elements are deeply interconnected. Then, to become a good outdoor leader, experience in a variety of practice situations is essential (Vikene et al. 2019). Sibthorp (2007) also highlights the active role of the leader and accountability in the process of planning, decision-making and action in small groups. Dewey (1938) points out that outdoor learning and education occurs when the purpose of learning and education is formed, which includes observation, knowledge from external sources and past experiences, as well as judgement. This "complex intellectual operation" has been interpreted as a heuristic reflection in much of the literature on experiential learning. In

³ The term literally translates as "outdoor living" and was popularised in the 1850s by the Norwegian playwright and poet Henrik Ibsen, who used the phrase to describe the value of spending time in remote places for spiritual and physical well-being.

the Scandinavian experiential learning tradition, inductive learning is based on problem solving - it is an accepted way of facilitating learning (Vikene et al. 2019). In learning related to *friluftsliv* (from Norwegian: life outdoors, in nature), learners receive feedback from nature (self-experience). According to Hattie & Timperley (2007), learners can develop strategies and regulate performance to achieve goals through self-regulation. When new unexpected situations arise, students must use creativity to solve problems (Beames & Brown, 2016). Recognizing patterns, considering options, and making subsequent decisions are important in learning (Tordsson 2014). Feedback can help a student overcome perceived limitations and help them discover unknown personal leadership resources instead of resisting efforts to develop leadership skills (Priest & Gass, 2018). In outdoor education at the University of Stavanger, feedback typically focuses on how students think about their options, how they make decisions, how they seek and provide information to the group, how they manage relationships within the group, and how they act as good role models for people whose words can inspire and influence. This approach is consistent with that of Paul Petzoldt, founder of the National Outdoor Leadership School in the USA. According to Wagstaff & Cashel (2008), Petzoldt expressed that feedback in judgment and decision-making skills is a key element of outdoor leadership. Therefore, it is extremely important not to neglect quality education and especially constant self-development, so that the senior teaching staff does not stay at one level, or fall, and thus not demotivate his approach to his teaching staff. As part of the inseparable **environmental context in outdoor education**, the educational leader should form a team of teaching staff, parents and children who meet regularly to plan and implement activities and processes in the outdoor natural environment of the kindergarten. Kindergarten classes work on these points throughout the school year in six categories:

- teamwork and management, leadership, team,
- energy saving in kindergarten,
- waste minimization in kindergarten,
- greening of school land,
- implementation of environmental elements in the school program,
- care for the environment.

Outdoor leadership or management means being responsible for people, their safety in the outdoor natural environment, having a positive relationship with nature and thus valuing it,

being active in environmental protection and thus pointing to a natural sustainable lifestyle (Bentsen, Andkjær & Ejbye-Ernst 2009, Grimeland 2009). Today, more and more children attending kindergarten are from multicultural backgrounds. Many families have an immigrant background, some have applied for asylum, have obtained refugee status - this is beginning to influence the upbringing and education in the kindergarten environment. It is therefore extremely important for teachers and educational leaders to ensure that children who come from different cultures, practising different religions, are able to be educated safely, equally, fairly and in good faith in the classroom within the state school system. What is needed here is an educational leader, but also a teacher in the role of a sensitive listener who sees and can act with tolerance and prudence in different situations and can build common understanding. Overall, all these key skills of the educational leader or teacher are based on experiential pedagogy and outdoor education. In outdoor education in pre-primary education, the emphasis is on the professionalism of all teaching staff and, in addition to the informational dimension, the ethical and moral dimension of all teaching staff is integral (Soilamo 2008). **The professional decision-making of the educational leader** should be guided by *justice, truthfulness and care (responsibility for others)*. In the light of multicultural factors, it is important to remember that truth is important to be sought together with all stakeholders involved in early childhood education. And the important empathy helps to face different problems (Talib, 2002). **Professional competencies** are not only the subject of reflection of the educational leader throughout his/her active teaching career. *Self-reflection allow all pedagogical staff to constantly develop the professionalism and philosophy of education along with moral values.* In order to understand other cultures, every educational staff member needs to know their values, norms, stereotypes, prejudices, but also to know the same within his/her own culture and society. Since equality and multiculturalism are part of any democratic educational system, the difference of cultures and religions and other socio-cultural elements in the educational environment are taken into account, i.e., equal treatment of all children and equal conditions for their development and progress (Siljamäki 2013). **Understanding the need for collaboration** in outdoor education is related to the professionalism of the work of the educational leader. This need is becoming more and more pronounced, especially in multicultural groups consisting of diverse children (Dettmer, Thurston, Knackendoffel & Dyck 2009, Kampwirth 2012). Outdoor education and its operation in such groups requires flexibility and the ability to act proactively, morally, morally and justly in unpredictable and novel situations (Siljamäki 2013). It is important for every educational staff member to know the needs of the child being educated and educated in pre-primary education. The educational

employee must observe the activities and actions of children in different ways and methods in order to make an effective diagnosis of each child. Sometimes it is necessary in outdoor education to anticipate, modify the outdoor educational environment and groupings of children, use different styles and methods of education more than usual. Consequently, correct and clear communication, giving feedback and activating children's thinking in all activities that support education and learning at that age. In addition, social-emotional individuation, i.e. the promotion of group education and learning, emotional skills and self-esteem, is also important and is a key moment within outdoor education that can positively influence these processes (Huovinen & Rintala 2013, Rintala et al. 2012). Martilla (2020) offers an inspiring and motivating perspective on the educational leader within outdoor education in pre-primary education:

- collaborate with other teachers, staff, social and health workers, clubs, associations, museums, libraries, individual enthusiasts and more. Through this collaboration, the application of many educational processes in practice is easier;
- share your good experiences with others;
- the professionalism of the leading pedagogical employee includes, in addition to the dimension of knowledge, skills, also the **ethical and moral dimension**. Constant development of philosophy of education and training, cooperation between different parties;
- **develop and work** on values that promote justice, truthfulness, responsibility and care for others;
- it is important that the head educator supports, among other things, **the rebuilding of his / her student identity** in relation to himself - to be open, honest, convinced that he will gain the trust and respect of others. If educated individuals are valued and respected, value education can also be provided (Talib 2002);
- for those who have always been outdoors, nature and the environment are essentially a safe place to think, but such a "lifestyle" is not taken for granted, so the head teacher is required **to be sensitive and empathetic in didactic decisions**;
- **the head, hand and heart** (*thinking, acting and feeling*) are a good guide in the didactic implementation of experiential and outdoor pedagogy when working with children in pre-primary education.

A good orientation of the kindergarten director in changing conditions, his good analysis of the school's possibilities, a coherent vision and the resulting concept of the school's work, simple, clear and functional management structures within the school, quality cooperation with the family, asserting itself in public (children's results) permanently by quality external relations, public awareness (advertising, advertising), further fundraising, all this ensures quality kindergarten management. If teachers' excellent management skills are associated with this - monitoring, programming, organising and using effective teaching methods, evaluation, self-reflection as well as the ability to work effectively with the other teacher, with the children's parents and with other partners or professionals - then ensuring the quality of the kindergarten and its climate is a priority (Bečvářová 2003). "Today, the whole philosophy of the status and functioning of the school is changing in the conditions of rapid social development and rapid changes in all areas of society. A school should be a flexible, open, dynamic system. In a competitive environment to create and offer quality services, to increase its image, to become more close to life, needs and requirements of society and individuals" (Šut'áková & Ferencová 2004, p. 5).



4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRE-SCHOOL MANAGERS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION

On the basis of the above-mentioned theoretical background, analysis of research studies and examples of good practice, we would like to formulate recommendations for practice for leading pedagogical staff in pre-primary education in outdoor education, which serve to support their skills in education, training and nature care:

- to set **specific but clear rules for the functioning of outdoor education in the environmental context, in pre-primary education** according to the legislation, to translate them into a comprehensively developed school educational programme and to update them to the current international discourse,
- to provide (in cooperation with the founder) pre-primary education with an appropriate number of regularly rotating teachers in terms of outdoor education, in an environmental context with full-day education and training,
- to provide (in cooperation with the founder) a **teaching assistant in outdoor education conditions, in an environmental context, a wider range of special aids and barrier-free adaptations of school** premises for pre-primary education of children with disabilities,
- work with the founder to provide **inclusive outdoor teams** for pre-primary education of children with special educational needs,
- intensify the **information of legal representatives of children** with special educational needs about the possibility of cooperation in **outdoor education, in an environmental context in pre-primary education**,
- to involve the legal representatives of all children in **community activities of the school** in the framework of **outdoor education, in an environmental context**, involved in the education and training of children,
- to innovate and, in particular, creatively use, in cooperation with the founder and parents, the **material and technical equipment of the kindergarten in active outdoor activities**,

- to orient the management activity towards the strategic guidance of **outdoor education in the environmental context**, the process of education and training and to use in particular the **potential of its own advisory bodies** by consistently applying their control, evaluation and professional-methodological function, including the promotion of the expansion of teachers' professional competences and the application of their educational experience in educational activities,
- **to control and evaluate regularly, consistently and directly** the use of educational methods of **outdoor education, in the environmental context**, the practices of teachers with emphasis on the even development of the elementary key competences of preschool children, paying attention to; *Respect for the developmental, performance level, momentary dispositions and specific needs of children, the use of play in the process of children's education and learning, the physiological/health effectiveness of children's exercises and physical activities, adherence to methodological recommendations related to the development of children's graphomotor skills, motor skills, the use and mastery of the national language without suppressing the child's cultural identity, comparing and confronting children's experiences, children's reasoning in self-reflection, self-representation,,*
- **not to forget self-development and further pedagogical education** within the framework of outdoor education with an environmental context.

Classroom Management Strategies for the Outdoors. Participation in outdoor activities may require alternative class management strategies from those applied in indoor settings. Childrens who have had little previous experience in outdoor settings may require reinforcement of appropriate rules of behaviour.

Suggestions to pre-school managers in outdoor education

- To build a cooperative mind-set, brainstorm a list of “ground rules” for the outdoor classroom. These can be posted on a wall in the classroom (with explanations) and a shorter version can be typed and put into a page protector or laminated and kept on an additional clipboard.
- Anticipate issues and concerns. Address any fears of being outside
- School grounds may often be better used as a site for direct experience rather than a site for direct instruction.

- Practice, practice, practice. Choose short excursions with a single focus to practice behaviour expectations (e.g., we are going to look for five examples of weathering).
- Childrens will learn quickly that the outdoors is simply an extension of your classroom.
- Keep childrens accountable to the expectations. Explain to childrens that they need to help each other stay on task. Attach a class list to your clipboard and track their behaviour using whatever system you use indoors.
- Get help. Invite community workers, parents and specialists to join in your activities and work with the childrens. Outline ways they can help, and when they should call upon you for assistance.

Groupings

- Develop productive "study buddy" group relations by recognizing, rewarding and building on positive interpersonal dynamics. Know who works well with whom and reward childrens by letting them choose their partners. Be attentive and inclusive of childrens with special needs.
- Arrange work groups. Groups of 2 to 4 people work well. When possible, partner behaviorally challenged childrens with an adult.
- Assign cooperative learning roles to group members such as equipment manager, time keeper, data recorder (according to Cornell & Louv 2015).

Before making any changes, it is important to evaluate existing practice. Using the bulleted lists above, review your current practice under the three headings: Workforce, Environment, Practice. Aim to agree what is working well and also to identify the areas for improvement. To gather a truly representative viewpoint, involve as many people as you can in this audit, including children, parents, practitioners, and non-teaching staff such as caretakers, cleaners, office staff, and midday supervisors. There will be a range of valid perspectives within the team. For example, the cleaner may feel that the muddy footprints to the cloakroom are a negative aspect of the current use of outdoors, while the practitioners may see muddy trails as an inevitable consequence of successful free-flow. Consider all the possible sources of evidence that could inform your decisions:

- Discussion with children, parents and colleagues.
- Observation of the outdoor area in use.

- Review of planning.
- Review of children's records.
- Review of displays and notice boards.
- Scrutiny of information, policies and paperwork.
- Review of resources and equipment storage.

Good outdoor practice has several elements and involves much more than a shed full of resources. The key elements of good practice are holistic and interrelated: workforce, environment, practice. Each aspect is of equal importance in securing high quality outdoor provision and practices in early years settings. Furthermore, improvements to the use of outdoors require action from everyone in the setting across all three elements. Let's look at these three elements in more detail.

Workforce

Leaders and managers demonstrate that they value and promote outdoors through:

- being outdoors themselves in all weathers,
- publicity and marketing materials,
- job descriptions,
- policies,
- development plans,
- budgets,
- staff training days,
- prospectus, noticeboards, displays and other information supplied to parents.

Practitioners are confident, knowledgeable, playful and enthusiastic about being outdoors.

They:

- value the outdoor environment and understand the benefits for children,
- have a positive attitude towards being outdoors,
- dress appropriately for the weather conditions,
- support risk-taking and assess risks to enable children's experiences rather than restrict them,
- consider and include use of the outdoor environment when planning next steps for children's learning and development,

- are attentive and engaged outdoors - playing alongside children and sensitively introducing new ideas, language and skills.

Environment

Practitioners create an enabling outdoor environment that:

- values children's interests, while planning further experiences that build on children's play ideas,
- provides children with sufficient space to be with others or to be alone,
- offers children challenging opportunities to be physically active,
- has secure boundaries,
- changes and evolves as children's play develops,
- has a variety of levels and surfaces,
- has places for shade and shelter,
- has safe places to sit and watch the world go by,
- is full of irresistible open-ended play materials,
- gives children access to water for play and gardening.

Practice

The setting's organisation, deployment of staff, and daily routines take account of the value of outdoors and ensure that:

- children have extended time to play outdoors on a daily basis,
- all children have independent access to outdoors,
- children and adults have allweather protection, and there is spare clothing,
- equipment is well organised,
- there are child-friendly accessible storage facilities,
- free-flow access and flexible deployment enables staff and children to move freely between indoors and outdoors,
- children's opportunities to be outdoors are not overly restricted by care routines (such as snacks and meals, rest and sleep, toileting and nappy changes),
- the set up/tidy up routines outdoors are minimal, and involve both staff and the children (Richardson 2012, Fernandes 2007).

Once you have a clear evaluation of the aspects that are working well, and those that need development, you can start to plan your next steps. Think about who to involve in action

planning. It is good practice to share the responsibility for planning improvements across the staff team and also to involve parents, children and non-teaching staff. This ensures that the planned changes are understood by all and makes maintaining the improvements in the longer term a more likely outcome. Many settings have had success in creating a working group that meets regularly to focus on the development process. Begin by working out whether you have identified the need for improvements across all three elements, or just one or two. If there is a lot to do, you will need to prioritise and set realistic timescales. Try to work out whether there is an underlying concern that is limiting children's outdoor experiences, such as staff knowledge and confidence. Also try to identify some 'quick wins' - changes that are easy and quick to accomplish at regular intervals, and make everyone feel as though things are actually happening. 'Quick wins' such as sorting out the shed, creating a display of outdoor learning, or putting together a box of den-building resources will help to maintain morale and a sense of momentum while the bigger issues get sorted more slowly. An action plan is a working document - it should not be created and then filed! It will need constant reviewing and amending as some actions are completed and further tasks are identified. Use it to record your actions, as well as timescales, responsibilities, funding requirements, and measures for knowing you have been successful (Richardson 2012).



SUMMARY

We believe that this publication, aimed at educational leaders and outdoor education in pre-primary education, will enrich and expand knowledge and pedagogical practice with new inspiring themes that will contribute to multiply the quality of the educational process implemented in the outdoor natural environment through the direct and active experience of children, and last but not least, it will especially help to show a different (motivating, inspiring) way of managing a kindergarten in the context of outdoor education with all its specificities. The aim of this publication was to show the management, leadership, management of the kindergarten in outdoor education, not only its relatively independent work activity in the issue of management, which is purposely defined by the division of labour, but especially the view of the head teaching staff, as a leader, a real role model in outdoor education and its management, the creation of a profile of the outdoor kindergarten. The organisation and management of kindergartens and school systems are increasingly becoming the subject of international cooperation, and we have therefore sought to use the results of the international *Erasmus+ project, Taking learning outdoors - supporting the skills of pre-school managers in outdoor education and care - TAKE ME OUT II. - Happy childhood happens outside - STEP HIGHER* in this publication for pre-school managers (directors).



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APPENDIX

Appendix 1 School curriculum for kindergarten with profiling for outdoor education

Appendix 1 School curriculum for kindergarten with profiling for outdoor education

1. Basic identification data about the school

2. Definition of the school's own goals and mission of education and training

3. The school's own focus

4. Curriculum

5. Planning background

6. Method and conditions for the completion of education and training and the issue of evidence of education

7. Staffing

8. Material, technical and spatial conditions

9. Conditions for ensuring health and safety in education and training

10. Internal control and evaluation system for children and staff

11. Continuing education requirements for teaching and professional staff

12. Appendix

13. References used

14. Acknowledgements

Note: For the creation of the School Educational Programme for kindergarten with profiling for outdoor education, you can use and build on the current document, respecting all the peculiarities of pre-primary education. Fedorko, V. et al. (2022). Metodika štandardov a štandardy outdoorovej edukácie v materskej škole. Kremnica: INAK.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PRE-SCHOOL MANAGERS IN THE CONTEXT OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Vladimír Fedorko

The publication is the output of the project: Erasmus + KA201 - Strategic Partnerships for school education Taking learning outdoors – supporting the skills of pre-school managers in outdoor education and care - TAKE ME OUT II. Happy childhood happens outside - STEP HIGHER.

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